

THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE OF MICHIGAN.

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BOARD OF HEALTH.

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The State is charged with no higher duty than the protection of the health and lives of its citizens. Lord Beaconsfield says it is the "first duty of the statesman." The theory of our form of government, and in fact of every form of enlightened government, is that each citizen is required to yield up a portion of his personal rights that the general good of all may be conserved. In return for this surrender of individual liberty, the State undertakes to make him secure in his person and in the undisturbed possession of his property. This security of person implies the right to labor in his own chosen calling, undisturbed and unhindered by another, so long as it is legal and does not trespass upon the rights of any other citizen. It implies the right for himself and family to the possession and enjoyment of the fruits of that labor, and gives him that sense of security in person and possessions which can only arise from a belief that his neighbors will respect his rights as he respects theirs, or that the State will interfere to restrain and protect for the general good.

The poor man's health is his capital; and the wages of each day's labor is the interest which that capital pays its owner. It is as much the duty of the State to protect that capital and make the owner secure in its possession, employment, and enjoyment, principal and interest, as it is to protect a railroad corporation in its franchises, or the proprietor of a skating rink in his rights. And so the laws of all just governments hold a man responsible for an injury done another that disables him from labor, to the extent of the damage sustained through carelessness, negligence, or maliciousness. Ignorance of the law may sometimes mitigate an offense against personal rights, but it can never justify it. A man must exercise ordinary care, or the same care to protect another from loss or injury as a prudent man would take to protect himself under like circumstances.

In Michigan these general principles have been embodied in the laws of the State, and constitute the guarantee of the commonwealth to the citizen that it will protect his life, his property, his family, and all his personal rights. So we have laws to secure the safety of persons while traveling on railroads, steamboats, and other public conveyances; to give them reasonable protection

while stopping at hotels, while attending theatres, concert halls, and other places of public gathering, to protect the employes of large manufacturing establishments, and the occupants of tenement houses, and to prevent the unnecessary spread of diseases which endanger the health and lives of the citizens of the State. These latter are known as the public health laws of Michigan. Under them the man who either intentionally or ignorantly exposes his neighbor or his family to any disease which interrupts his business or employment and subjects him to pecuniary loss, is equally a violator of the law with him who inflicts loss from exposure to fire, from accident while traveling upon railroads, while attending any place of public resort, or at work in any mill or factory, or while residing in any tenement house. To give effect to these laws, to see that they are properly observed and enforced, the State has created a State Board of Health, and a local board of health in each municipality in the State. The duties of the State Board, under the law, are supervisory and advisory. They have the "general supervision of the interests of the health and life of the citizens of the State." They are commanded to "study the vital statistics of the State and to endeavor to make intelligent and profitable use of the collected records of deaths and sickness among the people;" "to make sanitary investigations and inquiries respecting the causes of diseases, and especially of epidemics; the causes of mortality, and the effects of localities, employments, conditions, ingesta, habits, and circumstances on the health of the people. They shall, when required, or when they deem it best, advise officers of the government, or other State Boards, in regard to the location, drainage, water-supply, disposal of excreta, heating and ventilation of any public institution or building." They are required to "communicate with other State Boards of Health and with the local boards of health within the State," and to "prepare blank forms of returns, and such instructions as may be necessary, and forward them to the clerks of the several boards of health throughout the State." They shall collect information concerning vital statistics, knowledge respecting diseases, and all useful information on the subject of hygiene, and through an annual report and otherwise as the Board may direct, shall disseminate such information among the people. And the law further provides that the members of the Board shall receive no compensation for their services except traveling and other necessary expenses while employed on the business of the Board. This undoubtedly is a wise provision, designed to relieve the Governor and secure the best possible talent in the Board.

The State Board of Health has earnestly and honestly endeavored to carry out every provision of the law creating it. It has each year kept its expenditures within the amount appropriated for its use and covered back into the treasury an unexpended balance. It has prepared, printed, and circulated among local boards of health, health officers, and the people, over 500,000 copies of monographs on different subjects relating to public health; they have collected records of sickness and deaths in different parts of the State and given the results back to the whole people; they have inquired into the causes of local epidemics, and warned such communities of their danger; they have investigated special causes of sickness, such as poisonous cheese,* diseased meats, adulterated foods, and polluted water-supplies; they have visited vari-

* The Dairymans' Convention, held at Grand Rapids Feb. 25, 1885, unanimously adopted the following resolution:—

Resolved, That the thanks of this Convention be tendered to Prof. Vaughan for his instructive address on Cheese Poisoning, and also the State Board of Health for bearing the expenses incident to Dr. Vaughan's visit to this city.

ous places in the State where nuisances have been reported to them by aggrieved citizens, and advised as to the remedy in such cases; they have visited, at the request of the Board of Corrections and Charities, poor-houses and jails in different counties of the State, called attention to their defects and pointed out how they might be improved; they have visited the prisons and other State institutions, at the request of their officers or boards of control, to advise how their condition could be bettered, and their advice has generally been kindly and courteously received and often acted upon to the improvement of such institutions; they have examined plans of public buildings about to be erected, and suggested alterations as to heating, ventilation, sewerage, drainage, plumbing and lighting, and safety in case of fire, and these suggestions have been kindly and thankfully received and acted upon by architects and builders. And the result of these inspections of plans of public buildings is not only that the State has buildings better adapted to the uses for which they are designed, but more attention is being paid to these details in building public halls, school-houses, churches, and private residences, and in this way the comfort, safety, and health of the people are better cared for. It is proper to state that the Board did not examine the plans of the State House of Correction and Reformatory at Ionia.

They are in direct and frequent communication with every city, village, and township in the State, through their local boards of health and health officers. They act as a sort of central signal station to which signals of alarm and danger are sent from every part of the State, and from which warning is sent to the endangered and advice to the afflicted.

These local boards of health are charged with the duty of administering and enforcing the laws relating to the public health. That they have been stimulated and stirred into activity, through the efforts of the State Board, is not to be questioned; and probably the benefits secured to the people by the organization of the State Board are greater in this direction than in any other, and can be more readily appreciated. Before the organization of the State Board, these local boards existed but little more than in name. They rarely, if ever, met as a board, made no reports, and in fact many township and village officers never knew that by virtue of the offices they held they were members of a board of health. Now all this is changed, and in place of these inanimate bodies we have live, active, and working local boards of health in most of our cities, villages, and townships.

These boards are required by law to make annual reports to the State Board, and most of them, through their health physician, report weekly. They are required to meet annually and "appoint or re-appoint and to constantly have a health officer, who shall be a well-educated physician and act as the sanitary adviser and executive officer of the board." In townships where it is not practicable to secure the services of a well-educated physician, the board may appoint the supervisor or some other person as such health officer. They shall report the name of such health officer to the State Board of Health, at Lansing, together with his address and a statement whether he is a physician or some other person. They shall regulate and audit all fees and charges of persons employed by them in the execution of the health laws and of their own regulations. Special meetings may be called by the President or any two members of the board; and they shall make special reports to the State Board of Health whenever they are so required. They shall give public notice of all regulations made by them, and such notice shall be deemed legal notice to all

persons. And the health officer shall, on the receipt of information of a case of small-pox, diphtheria, scarlet fever, or other communicable disease, dangerous to public health, keep the president of his own board and the Secretary of the State Board of Health constantly advised in respect to such outbreak of disease, and of the facts so far as the same shall come to his knowledge respecting sources of danger from any such diseased person, or infected article being brought into or taken out of his township, city or village.

The local board shall make such regulations respecting nuisances, source of filth, and causes of sickness within their respective townships as they shall judge necessary for the public health and safety. Whenever they shall think it necessary, they may enter any building or vessel in their township for the purpose of examining into and destroying, removing, or preventing any nuisance, source of filth, or cause of sickness. They may make such rules and regulations in relation to the care and cleansing of privies and water-closets as they may deem desirable for the preservation of the health of the inhabitants; or they may declare any such privy or water-closet a nuisance and order it abated. When they shall judge it necessary, they shall assign certain places for the exercise of any trade or employment offensive to the inhabitants or dangerous to the public health, and forbid the exercise thereof in any place not so assigned.

Whenever a health officer shall receive reliable notice, or shall otherwise have good reason to believe that there is within his township a case of small-pox, diphtheria, scarlet fever, or other communicable disease, dangerous to the public health, it shall be his duty to immediately investigate the subject, and to order the prompt and thorough isolation of those sick or infected with such disease, so long as there is danger of communicating it to other persons, and to see that no person suffers for lack of nurses or other necessities, because of isolation for the public good. He shall give public notice by placard and promptly notify teachers or superintendents of schools concerning families in which are contagious diseases. He shall supervise funerals of persons dead from any communicable disease, disinfect rooms, clothing, and premises, and all articles likely to be infected, before allowing their use by persons other than those in isolation. And this well-educated physician, health officer, and sanitary adviser shall receive as compensation for his services a sum not less than two dollars per day.

Local boards of health shall provide hospitals or some suitable place for the reception and treatment of persons sick with infectious disease dangerous to the public health; or they may consider the house in which the person is taken sick a hospital, as the condition of the patient and the public safety may seem to demand.

It would be unprofitable, and it is unnecessary, to pursue these citations further; and it is only necessary to add that the law confers upon local boards of health ample authority to make and enforce any regulation necessary to protect the citizens of their respective localities against the spread of any communicable disease dangerous in its character, to limit it to the first cases recognized, and in the end to stamp it out. It provides penalties for the violation of any of their ordinances, and for the non-performance of duties; it makes them the administrators of all our public health laws, and to their activity, zeal, and intelligence in enforcing these laws must the people of Michigan look for security against the spread in their midst of all infectious diseases and avoidable sources of diseases which endanger their lives and health and entail suffering and pecuniary loss upon every community they visit.

Nor does the law relieve from responsibility the citizens of the State in regard to the means by which disease is communicated. It requires every householder, hotel-keeper, keeper of a boarding house, and tenant who shall have knowledge of the presence of any communicable disease dangerous to the public health, in his family, hotel, boarding house, or on his premises, to give prompt notice of the fact to the health officer, president, or clerk of the board of health of his township; and if he shall refuse or neglect to immediately give such notice he shall forfeit a sum not exceeding one hundred dollars. And it is the duty of supervisors and presidents of local boards of health to see that their provision of the law is complied with.

I have thought it worth while, Mr. President, to call the attention of this Convention to the law governing both the State and local boards of health, because it was suggested to me by one of the officers of the Convention that the powers and duties of local boards of health were but little understood and appreciated by the people in general.

One of the objects the State Board has in view in holding these Conventions in different parts of the State, is to get the health officers and members of local boards in the immediate vicinity together, that they may have an opportunity to compare notes with each other, learn of each other, and be brought in direct contact with the State Board and with the people, and thus have their zeal renewed and their interest increased in the great and good work of caring for the public health. The State Board is anxious to learn of the difficulties these officers have to contend with, and also to be informed of the successes they have achieved. Another object is to discuss before the people the questions that pertain to the health of the people in the different localities where they are held. And still another, and the most important of all, is to endeavor to awaken in the minds of the people an appreciation of the importance of this work, and to induce them, if possible, to feel that they have a direct and personal interest in its success. For after all, public sanitation is to a very large degree the personal work of the citizen. The State Board may advise and admonish, the local boards may make and honestly strive to enforce wise regulations; but if the people are careless and indifferent all their efforts will end in failure. To-day we come before the people of Lansing, the beautiful Capitol of a great State, rich in its varied resources, proud of its public institutions, and of the intelligence and enterprise of its citizens, and ask your personal efforts in behalf of the success of this Convention, to the end that the interests of public health may be advanced both here and throughout the State.

